

**FURTHER EVIDENCE OF OPHIOPHAGY IN AN AUSTRALIAN FALCON:** Australia, despite the presence of a rich terrestrial snake fauna, does not support a specialised predator of snakes among its raptors. One species, the Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* Vigors and Horsfield, does possess certain morphological features - densely feathered breast, thick toes, and coarsely scaled legs and feet - that are usually associated with specialised snake-eating raptors such as the Old World snake eagles, *Circaetus* and *Spilornis*, and New World Laughing Falcon, *Herpetotheres cachinnans*.

Although there are a number of records of Brown Falcons preying on snakes in the older literature (Shea, 1987), these do not provide identifications of the snakes involved. Recent reports (see Sontter and Debus, 1985; Shea, 1987 and citations therein) provide evidence that these raptors may be important predators of snakes in some areas (if not the greater part of the falcon's range). The following contribution provides evidence based on field observations of Brown Falcons as predators of both elapid and colubrid snakes. The observations reported were made during general surveys of raptors. Each record is summarised in the anecdotal list below. Lengths of snakes given are estimates and are only provided for complete specimens.

Brown Tree Snake *Boiga irregularis*: single record of 1.0m specimen being carried in flight, Maleny, SEQ (October 1971).

Green Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis punctulatus*: one partially eaten specimen brought to nest, Woodford, SEQ (November 1986); one being carried in flight, 0.8-1.0m, over Bruce Highway near Nambour, SEQ (August 1990).

Keelback *Tropidonotus muirii*: two partially eaten specimens observed in nest, Woodford, SEQ (November 1986).

Yellow-faced Whip Snake *Demansia psammophis*: one 0.5m specimen being carried in flight, near Townsville, NEQ (July 1979); one specimen being eaten on roadside post, Bundaberg, SEQ (August 1979); one specimen, 0.6-0.8m, being carried in flight, Yarraman, SEQ (April 1987).

Whip Snake *Demansia* sp.: partially eaten specimen being carried in flight, Richmond, CQ (May 1984)

Marsh Snake *Hemiaspis signata*: one specimen being eaten at perch, near Kenilworth, SEQ (December 1976).

Red-bellied Black Snake *Pseudechis porphyriacus*: single partially eaten specimen being carried in flight, Maleny, SEQ (June 1978).

Eastern Brown Snake *Pseudonaja textilis*: one specimen carried in flight, 0.9-1.1m, near Rockhampton, CEQ (May 1985); one specimen being carried in flight, 1.1-1.2m, near Gladstone, SEQ (April 1981); one partially eaten specimen being carried in flight near West Wyalong, SCNSW (December 1984).

Brown Snake *Pseudonaja* sp.: (possibly *P. guttata*) being carried in flight, 0.5-0.6m, near Richmond, CQ (August 1983).

These observations provide further evidence that the Brown Falcon, although a generalist predator, is an accomplished predator of snakes. Not only are non-venomous and mildly venomous species taken, highly dangerous species of the genera *Austrelaps*, *Notechis*, *Pseudechis* and *Pseudonaja* are also successfully preyed upon (see also Sontter and Debus, 1985; Shea (1987). It would also appear from the above observations and the records published to date, that there is no tendency on the part of these raptors to select smaller sized elapids relative to colubrids.

#### Literature Cited

- Shea, G.M. 1987. Bibliography of herpetological References in Australian ornithological journals. Smithsonian Herpetological Information Service Series 73: 16-45
- Sontter, C. and Debus, S.J.S. 1985. The Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* as a predator of snakes. Australian Bird Watcher 11: 92-93.

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